

caracas museum
of contemporary art



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LAGOVEN  BOOKLETS

The Collection of the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art: a Venezuelan Cultural Patrimony

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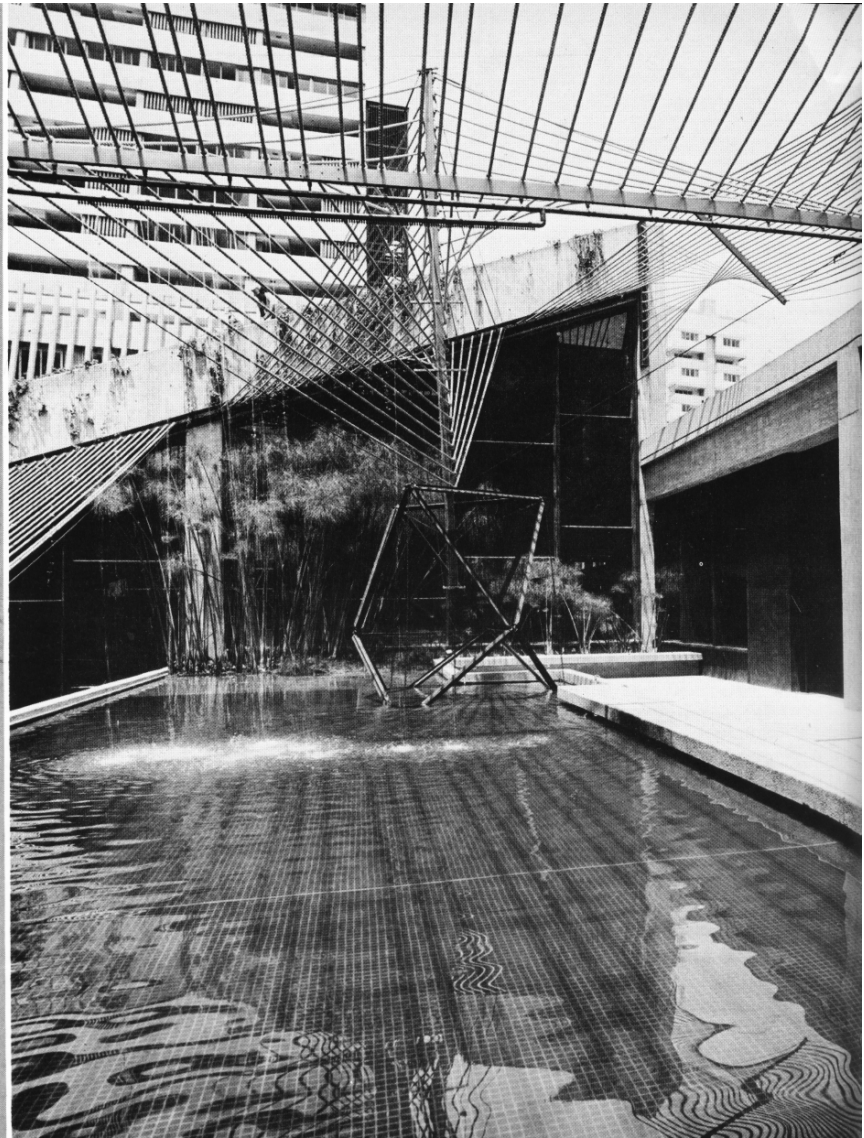
One of the most important specific functions of a high-quality museum is to gather and benefit from the widest possible collection of those "objects" that bear testimony of the cultural period the museum is devoted to. Every museum worthy of its name must play this vital role. To this effect, a two-level activity should be carried out. First and basically, the museum should gather and enrich a high-standard collection, as well as preserve and properly restore every single work of art. Second, at a more advanced and rigorous level, it should frequently exhibit such works, arrange them in a clear and harmonious manner, and study, document and interpret all works in order to ensure a better understanding by visitors, particularly by those with no specialized plastic knowledge. These have been and still are the permanent and main objectives of the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art from its creation almost fourteen years ago.

A Developing Process

From its inception in 1973, the foremost objective of the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art has been to assemble a collection of outstanding national and international works of contemporary art, highlighting especially those post-Second World War artistic expressions. The Museum's Collection started to expand from an ensemble of nearly fifty works given in 1973 on a loan basis by Simón Bolívar Center in Caracas. This first group of works was rapidly enlarged by a long series of highly planned direct acquisitions and by a large number of donations and loans made by public and private entities as well as by artists and private collectors. It is worth mentioning that many of these works were either simply donated or acquired under very special terms owing to the good relations Sofía Imber de Rangel, the Museum's Director, has with famous international art masters she met during her long stay in Europe. Likewise, many artists agreed to generously donate one of their works once exhibited at the Museum, as a way to materialize the respect the Museum and the artist bore to each other.

Over almost fourteen years, in a relatively fast expanding process, the Museum's Collection has gathered about 700 works such as paintings and sculptures of medium and large format by the best national and foreign artists. Several works of monumental scale are to be highlighted, some of which take on definitely architectural proportions and nature, as for example *Ambiente Spaziale con Concetto Spaziale. Atessa*, 1968, by Lucio Fontana; *Virtual Vibrante*, 1968, by Alejandro Otero; *Estructuras Aéreas Ambientales*, 1972, by Gego, and *Atmósfera*, 1974, by Domingo Alvarez. During its first five years, works by renowned artists were contributed to the Museum's assets, namely works by Jesús Soto, Alejandro Otero, Marisol Escobar, José Luis Cuevas, Gego, Francisco Narváez, Wen Ying Tsai, Fernando Botero, Richard Smith, Lucio Fontana, Eugène Biel-Bienne, Nicolas Schöffer, John Latham, Nedo, Costas Tsoclis, Larry Bell, Pedro León Zapata, Jacques Monory, Manuel Espinoza, Domingo Alvarez, Alirio Rodríguez, Valerio Adami, Francisco Salazar, Mateo Manaure, Larry Rivers, Red Grooms, Seka, and Victor Vasarely. On the Museum's 5th anniversary and by request of its board, the Venezuelan government

GEGO
"Estructuras Aéreas
Ambientales", 1972
Iron tensors
and nylon ropes
1,800 x 1,750 x 2,200 cm
(approximately)



decided to assign an annual budget allotment to this Institution, with the intentions of contributing to the Museum's development and to its main objectives, particularly the expansion of its Collection. The Venezuelan government was thus strengthening its solidarity vis-à-vis the Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as awarding a deserved acknowledgement to the efficient task carried out by the Museum. Over the next five years, using a large part of this substantial financial support, works of outstanding merit were included in the Collection through a meticulous and systematic search. As a result, the Collection was enhanced with works by foreign masters, namely Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Miró, Moore, Chagall, Léger, Jean Arp, Alexander Calder, Jean Dubuffet, Francis Bacon, Joaquín Torres-García, Fernando Botero, Auguste Herbin, Richard Lindner, Edward Kienholz, Edgard Negret, Alberto Magnelli, Julius Bissier, George Segal, Serge Poliakoff, John Davies, and Reg Butler. At the same time, the Collection was expanded by means of acquisition, donation or on a loan basis with works of Venezuelan talents as Armando Reverón, Francisco Narváez, Héctor Poleo, Rafael Monasterios, Alejandro Otero, Jesús Soto, Marisol Escobar, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Gego, Pedro León Zapata, Cornelis Zitman, Manuel de la Fuente, Seka, Luisa Richter, Régulo Pérez, Alirio Rodríguez, Jacobo Borges, Luis Guevara Moreno, Marcel Floris, Víctor Valera, Manuel Quintana Castillo, and Alirio Palacios. Over the past four years, the Collection has been greatly expanded. Several works have been directly acquired by the Museum such



HENRY MOORE
"Reclining Figure", 1982
 Bronze
 118 x 246 x 110 cm



MARISOL ESCOBAR
"Mi Mamá y Yo", 1968-1982
 Iron and bronze, 205 x 150 cm

as two canvases and ten graphic works by Picasso, the magnificent sculptures by Miró and Baltasar Lobo, and the paintings by Tàpies, Alechinsky, Rauschenberg, and Jiri Kolar. Other valuable pieces have been given on a loan basis by various institutions, as for example Maillol's impressive sculpture *Action Enchaînée*, 1906, (given by custody of INCE, the National Institute for Educational Culture), and the collection from BND, the National Discount Bank, which includes sculptures by Auguste Rodin and Alexander Archipenko, as well as paintings by Claude Monet, Wassily Kandinsky, Emil Nolde, Max Ernst, Manuel Cabré, Maurice de Vlaminck, and Maurice Utrillo.

This fast, systematic, and selective expanding process has led to one of the best collections of contemporary art both in Venezuela and Latin America.

Noteworthy Value

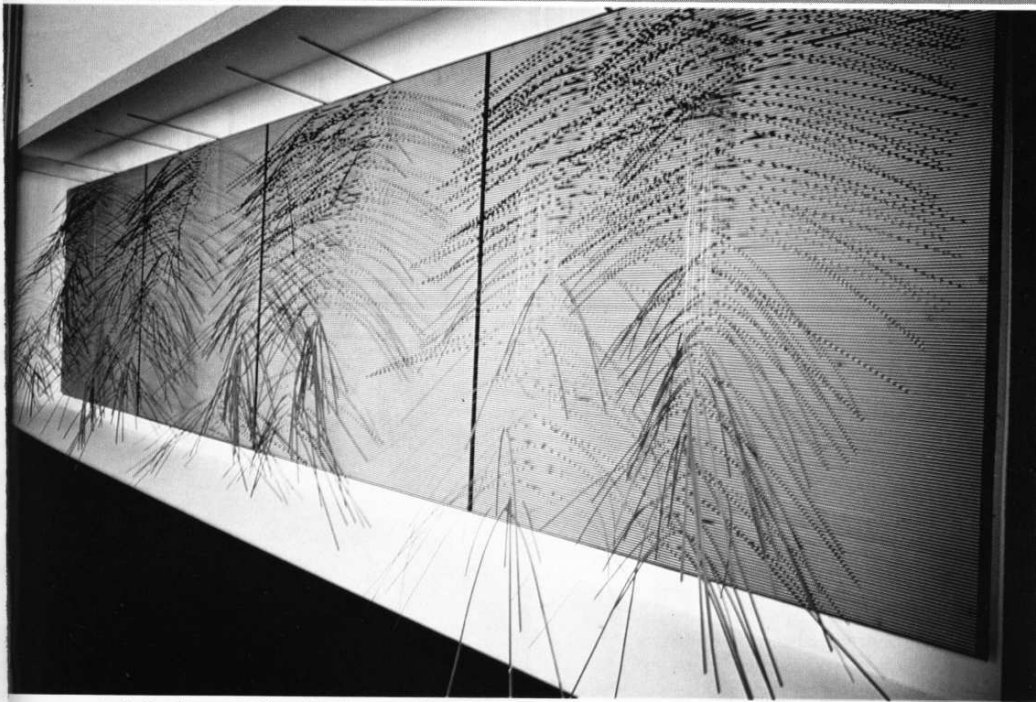
The directors of the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art are fully aware that the acquisition of really outstanding works is not a superfluous expense, but rather an investment yielding high dividends to Venezuela's cultural assets for the benefit of the community as a whole. As a result, one of their major concerns and goals is to constantly enhance the Museum's Collection. Hence, they have allotted a substantial part of the Museum's financial resources, amounting sometimes up to even half its global budget, to duly fulfill such objective. Nevertheless, this firm commitment to expand the Collection has not led to neglect the quality of the works. As a matter of fact,

the main guideline of the Museum's policy has been the highly rigorous selection of works of art, upon systematic search for offers on the international art market with a view to finding the best contemporary works by the major artists. In accordance with this rigorous criterion of selection, the Museum's directors have even preferred to acquire one single work of outstanding merit rather than various works of art of poor quality.

Although this qualitative requirement unavoidably restricts quantity, one single noteworthy work by a master, a pioneer and leader of a given art movement, is more valuable as a historical, formal, aesthetic, and pedagogic model than a variety of mediocre works by second-class artists.

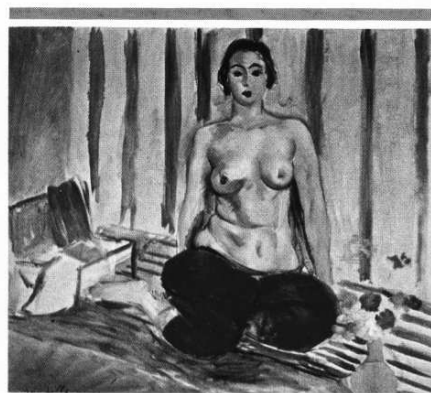
Obviously, the artistic assets of the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art are still limited. However big and powerful it may be, no museum has enough financial, material, spatial, and human resources to gather the whole production of the period it is devoted to. With its scarce available resources, the Museum of Contemporary Art has not sought to include in its Collection outstanding works representing all and every movement, group, and artist from the endless and heterogeneous universe of contemporary plastic arts.

In designing and implementing its acquisition policy, the Museum's directors, aware of their limitations, have devoted their efforts and available resources to creating and enhancing groups of works depicting some of the decisive moments in the development of art during this century. The Collection has thus been enhanced with representative pieces by many of the leading masters of the



Jesús Soto's mural "Signals", shown at the Museum's North entrance.

20th century, namely Picasso (represented by fifteen works referred to later on), Braque (with his remarkable *Le Billard*, 1948-49, and his *Palette et Fleurs*, 1954), Miró (who dazzles us with his vigorous canvas *La Leçon de Ski*, 1966, and his totemic bronze *Femme et Oiseau*, 1962-81), Chagall (abstracted in *Le Carnaval Nocturne*, 1979, in its oneiric world of children's poetry and ancestral folklore), Moore (deeply rooted in his mother country in the monumental *Reclining Figure*, 1982), Léger (offering a strongly sociopolitical message through the blunt "realistic" language used in *Acrobates et Musiciens*, 1945, and *Etude pour les Constructeurs: Esquisse sur Fond Jaune*, 1950), Matisse (attesting with "Odalisque au Pantalon Rouge", 1925, his refined taste for chromaticism and his clear hedonist tendency), among others. Furthermore, the 19th century is deservedly represented in the Museum's Collection by two Claude Monet's delightful canvases (*Waterloo Bridge*, 1902, and *Les Pyramides à Port-Coton*, 1886), the hieratic *Le Penseur*, undated, by Auguste Rodin, and the colossal bronze *Action Enchaînée*, 1906, by Aristide Maillol. In addition to the works by such masterful artists, the Museum has also acquired a group of pieces from various contemporary art movements. Geometric Abstraction is represented by distinguished artists such as Josef Albers (showing subtle theoretical plastic progress in his paintings *Early Yellow*, 1951; untitled, 1955, and *Fall Finale*, 1962, from his famous *Homage to the Square* series), Auguste Herbin (bluntly revealing his rigid aesthetic puritanism in *Tempête*, 1953, *Bond*, 1958, and *Accent*, 1959), and Alberto



HENRI MATISSE
 "Odalisque au Pantalon Rouge"
 1925
 Oil on canvas
 60.5 x 73.5 cm

General view of a Museum gallery with works by young artists from the Collection.



Magnelli (whose *Limitation Complexe*, 1953, worthily attests a flexible plastic and structural freedom). The Collection is also enhanced by different Geometric-Constructive expressions by Venezuelan artists such as Nedo, Mercedes Pardo, Francisco Salazar, Víctor Valera, Mateo Manaure, and Carlos Medina. Likewise, Optical-Kinetic movement is profusely represented in the Collection by both foreign leading masters such as Nicolas Schöffer, Wen Ying Tsai (and his striking cybernetic constructions), and Victor Vasarely (with his outstanding works as *Yllava*, 1955-75, *Capella*, 1964, and *Teyoute*, 1972-76), and paramount national talent, namely Jesús Soto (noticeably present in the Collection with a large series of murals), Alejandro Otero (and his rather differently conceived works *Tablón N° 60*, 1973, and the urban *Virtual Vibrante*, 1968), Carlos Cruz-Diez (overwhelming with color from the changing kaleidoscope of his physichromes N° 2021 and N° 2022, 1980, and N° 2031, 1981), and Gego (masterful in *Estructuras Aéreas Ambientales*, 1972, and her intimate *Reticulárea: Cuadrado N° 6*, 1973, and *Esfera N° 6*, 1977). The Museum's Collection provides renowned examples of informal Abstraction ranging from the Far-East influenced spiritual signs of Julius Bissier, the sculptures by Francisco Narváez, the pierced and torn canvases by Lucio Fontana, the transparent blurred planes by Luisa Richter or Manuel Quintana Castillo, the opaque textural impastos by Antoni Tàpies, the joyful chromatic combinations by Alexander Calder to the cyclopean *Peinture Murale*, 1965, by Serge Poliakoff. At both ends of the informal Abstraction spectrum,

the Collection includes various works that have been influenced either by geometry (*Clef de Jacquemart*, 1962, by Jean Arp, and the "Support-Surface" objects by Richard Smith) or by Figuration (the delicate *Pièce d'Eau*, 1960, by Baltasar Lobo, and *Torso*, undated, by Francisco Narváez). Proving such an aesthetic tolerance, it is not surprising that the Collection gathers works from the Minimal Art by Larry Bell and Víctor Lucena, or from Constructivism such as *Puente a Caracas*, 1975, by Edgard Negret, exhibited along with works based upon fairly different theories and methods as the Symbolic Constructive structures by Joaquín Torres-García (*Constructivo con Signos I y II*, 1937), the formless instinctive eruptions of the "Art Brut" by Jean Dubuffet (*Les Echelles du Regard*, 1977), and the impulsive "graffiti" by Pierre Alechinsky, closely following "COBRA style". Figuration is also extensively represented in the Museum's Collection. Sometimes it takes on the nostalgic appearances of early Expressionism, as in *Portrait Eine Dame*, 1920-25, and *Rater Nohn und Ritterspon*, 1955, by Emil Nolde; *Köchel*, 1902, by Wassily Kandinsky; *Spring Torso*, 1925, by Alexander Archipenko; *Sun and Sea*, 1946, by Max Ernst; *Maisons près d'un Etang* by Maurice de Vlaminck; *Dos Indias*, 1939, by Armando Reverón; *The Lion (Selfportrait)*, 1960, and *The Ghosts*, 1964, by Eugène Biel-Bienne, and *Eglise and Rue Norvins* by Maurice Utrillo. It may instead follow the tortuous paths of Expressionist Neofiguration, by means of tearing forms like those of Francis Bacon (*Figure at a Washbasin*, 1971), Jacobo Borges (*Humilde Venezolano*, undated, and



GEORGES BRAQUE
"Le Billard"
1948-49
Oil on canvas
145 x 195 cm

Los Espíritus de la Coronación de Napoleón, 1963), Alirio Rodríguez (*Homenaje a George Orwell*, 1972, and *Ambito N° 5*, 1977), Manuel de la Fuente (*Principio y Fin*, 1982) and Cornelis Zitman (*La Cama Grande*, 1972); through more Surrealist-oriented effects as those produced by Valerio Adami and Alirio Palacios, or even with a humorous and satirical flavor as in the case of Fernando Botero (*Autorretrato con Luis XIV, según Rigaud*, 1973, and *La Putica*, 1977), and Pedro León Zapata (*Monóxida Lisa*, 1975). Figurative expressions in the Museum's Collection are notably represented by Pop-Art works, namely the indescribable creatures of a melancholic Marisol (*Los Mercaderes*, 1965; *La Reina Isabel*, 1978; *Mi mamá y yo*, 1968-82); the mechanical images resulting from the industrial techniques and massive consumption featured by Robert Rauschenberg (*Urban Order*, 1985) and Larry Rivers (*Miss Popcorn*, 1972); the corrosive assemblage by Edward Kienholz (*Blue Boy and Pinkie*, 1979), and the keen composition by Richard Lindner (*Encounter*, 1976). Both the work by Edward Kienholz and that by Richard Lindner have critical intentions going beyond the cold messages offered by George Segal (*Woman Looking through Window*, 1981), John Davies (*Two Figures one on another's shoulders + pole*, 1977-80) and, Reg Butler (*Girl on back*, 1968-72).



FERNANDO BOTERO
"Autorretrato con Luis XIV, según Rigaud"
 1973
 Oil on canvas
 290 x 197 cm



FRANCISCO NARVAEZ
"Tres Volúmenes"
 1981
 Bronze
 134 x 84 x 76 cm

JOAN MIRO
"La Leçon de Ski"
1966
Oil on canvas
194.5 x 324 cm



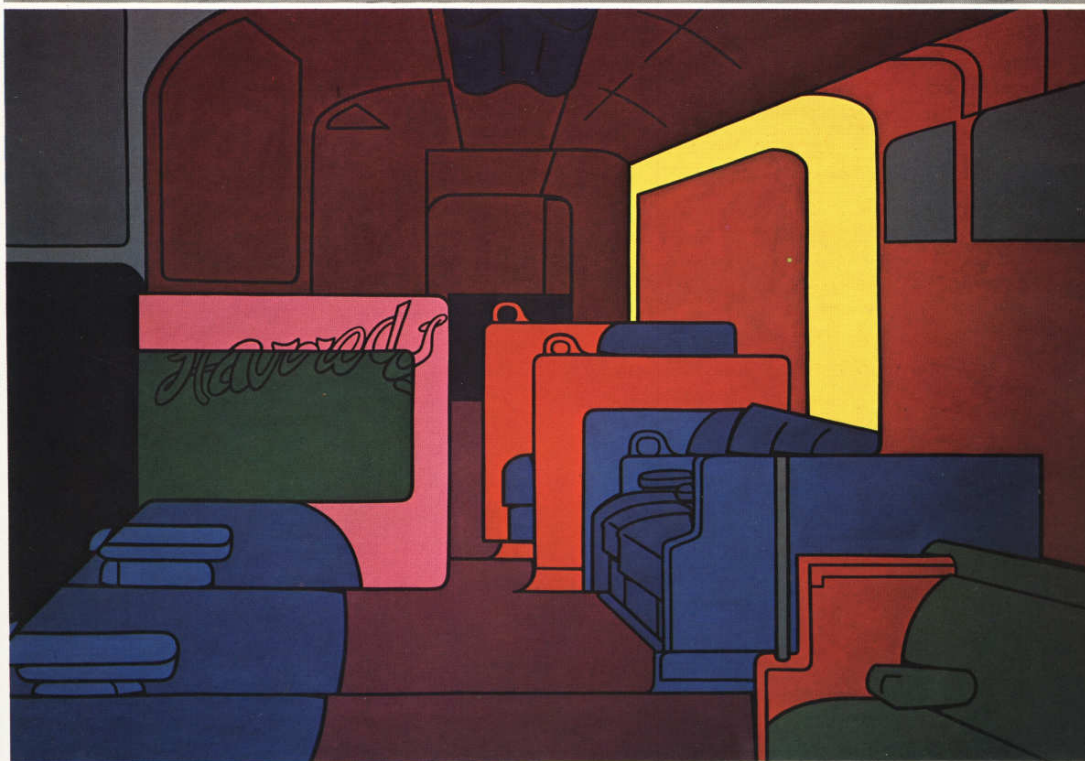
FERNAND LEGER
"Acrobates et Musiciens"
1945
Oil on canvas
114 x 146 cm



MARC CHAGALL
"Le Carnaval Nocturne"
1979
Oil on canvas
130 x 162 cm



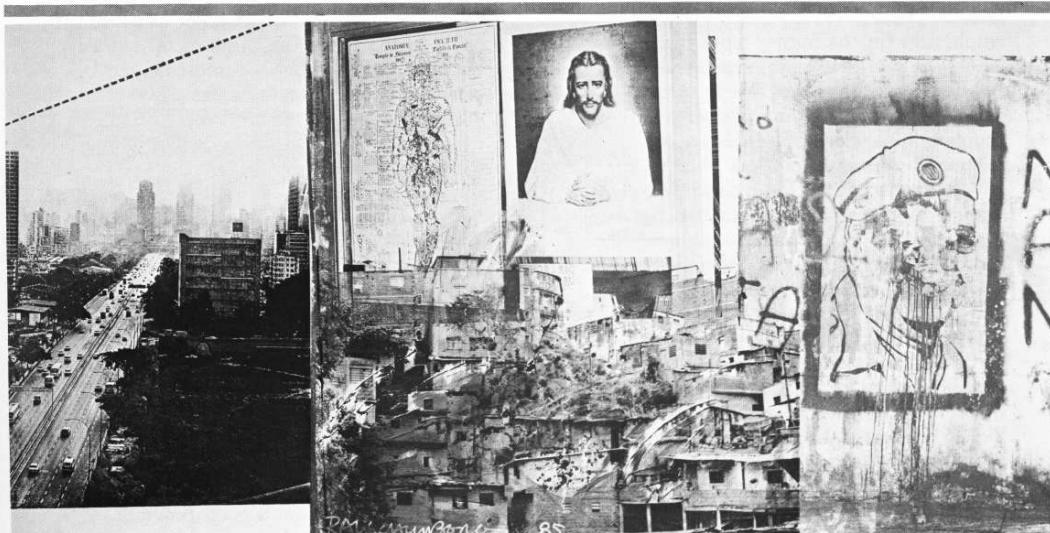
VALERIO ADAMI
"La Sala d'Aspetto della Paddington Station"
1968-1969
Acrylic on canvas
243 x 366 cm



CLAUDE MONET
"Waterloo Bridge"
1902
Oil on canvas
62.2 x 93 cm



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
"Urban Order", ROCI-Venezuela
1985
Acrylic and serigraphy on wood
125.6 x 250.6 cm



Picasso and the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art's Collection

The ensemble including fifteen works by Picasso and gathered in a especially designed gallery constitutes one of the most attractive assets of the Museum. Regardless of the two drawings and eight engravings by Picasso included in the Collection, let us briefly describe the five masterful canvases by this universal artist gathered in the Collection. In *Buste de Femme*, 1941, and in *Deux Femmes Assises*, 1958, Picasso strongly emphasizes (in the former more than in the latter) the synthesis of volumes as well as geometricized forms, extensively using straight lines and rhythmically reiterated simple graphic elements. In *Buste de Femme*, Picasso reduces Dora Maar to an enigmatic mechanical figure, with a body severely disjointed in rigid angular sheets and a face cruelly dislocated in animal-like hideous masks. The grand *Deux Femmes Assises*, even if highly geometricized, offers relief to the eyes by means of ample background and figures, and a more rhythmical movement resulting from the numerous curves.

In *Buste de Femme (Jacqueline)*, 1962, Picasso replaces rigid geometricized forms with soft curvilinear rhythms. He keeps from Cubism nothing but the threefold perspective of Jacqueline's face, whose front (face's oval and right eye) and both opposite side views (to the right, nose; to the left, lips, chin, left eye, and hair clasped in a ponytail with a yellow ribbon) are simultaneously represented.

In *Femme au Chapeau*, 1962, and *Nuet et*

Homme Assis, 1969, Picasso gives free reins to his unique will by trampling conventional proportions, shattering lines and volumes, completely changing traditional chromatic schemes, joining anatomic parts in an unexpected manner, and recreating a distorted universe colonized by disturbing monsters. Nobody but a genius as noted as Picasso may risk carrying out, with a slight hope for success, deformations and aggressions as brutal and "antihuman" as those depicted in *Nuet et Homme Assis*.

Picasso's considerable endowment as painter, shown in the above five canvases, is perfectly extended and thoroughly complemented by the talent as a graphic artist he proves to possess through the two drawings and the four engravings gathered in the Collection.

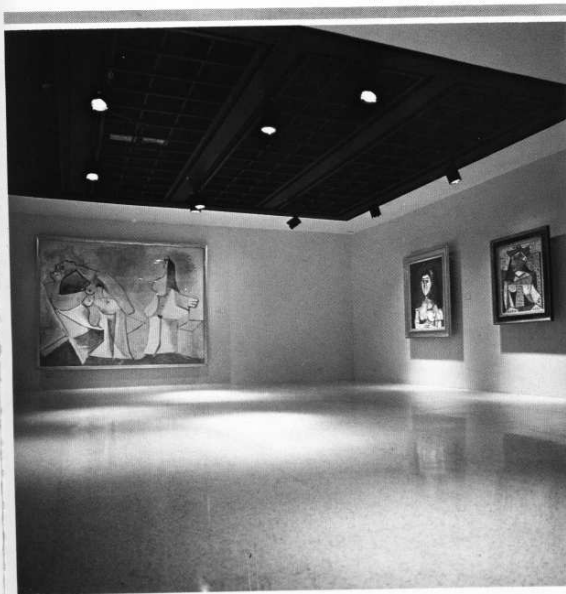
These eleven superb works by the enlightened master, so efficiently laid out in an especially designed gallery, constitute the worthiest and more renowned masterpieces from the Collection: they alone are an excellent reason to come from anywhere and visit the Caracas Museum of Contemporary Art as well as to return time after time, all the more since it offers the primary sources of the most important knowledge about contemporary art.

The Museum's Collection is after all an invaluable national patrimony at the permanent service of all Venezuelans. A series of researches and a good program of didactic diffusion, including guided tours, didactic panels, audio-visual material, study guides, catalogs, press articles and other publications, are being organized by the Museum in an attempt to make the most of the exemplary historical, cultural, and



pedagogic value of this Collection. On the other hand, the Collection is already rich enough as to hold a large number of coherent exhibits. Sensibility and perspicacity shall continue being the effective bases for the management of the Collection, not only to exhibit works of art, but also, and above all, to document, study, and interpret as deep as possible these genuine masterpieces of the 20th-century art, prestigious patrimony of all Venezuelans.

Picasso Collection.



PABLO PICASSO
*"Nuet et
Homme Assis"*
1969
Oil on Canvas
163 x 130.2 cm





PABLO PICASSO
*"Femme au
Chapeau"*
1962
Oil on canvas
61 x 50 cm